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ABSTRACT

A study combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (a direct survey) investigated the attitudes of 75 working class individuals in Glasgow, Scotland toward differences in the speech of older or younger people and in the speech of the opposite sex. Results indicate that dialect lexis loss was neither as thorough nor as abrupt as older informants represented. The contradiction appeared to stem from a decrease in the use of certain terms, rather than curtailed use, of which the older generation was more aware. Adults altered their speech in deference to children's education, and older speakers who have not adjusted to changes in everyday speech felt eccentric and out of touch. The young were perceived to be foul-mouthed. Most parents were unwilling to enforce their language standards, with the dividing line between roughness and respectability disappearing. Younger speakers seemed to categorize Scots as slang. These changes resemble a generation gap in language. The findings suggest that the nonstandard forms of language persist without expressing a distinctive conceptual order. Unevenness in linguistic change is what would be expected of the spontaneous convergence of one language variety on another. (MSE)

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QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS INTO WORKING-CLASS LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

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Perhaps because of its pursuit of scientific credibility, sociolinguistics often produces results first, and looks later for applications or areas of wider interest to which sociolinguistic findings can be attached. Basic sociological concepts, such as socioeconomic stratification and social networks, are built into the research design, and provide apparently reliable categories. But the findings may then turn out to have significance in terms of more complex issues such as sex roles, self-image or self-conciousness about speech. Since topics of this kind were not directly under investigation, the researchers fall back on common-sense. Post hoc, common sense, interpretations of speakers' motives can be, and have been, biased by researchers' own class- or gender-centred worldviews. For instance, attempts to describe the speech of women in terms of its deviation from a male norm have been criticised by Cameron (1985) and Spender (1980). Reah (1982) criticises the assumption underlying Labov's (1972) explanation of stylistic variation in speech (that more self-conscious styles are the same as more standard styles) since speakers can be self-consciously broad in their speech.

I began my fieldwork, in an inner city area of Glasgow,[1] with a vague sense that in sociolinguistics our understanding of the working-class was pretty shallow. There has been a lack of exploratory work on the terminology of language attitudes within the working-class, and the issues that are of active concern to them. The superiority of Standard English is so fundamental a premise of English-language-medium education that it is sometimes difficult for a contradictory view to find expression - especially when the research agenda keeps niggling away at a sensitive area: the contrast in status between Standard English (middle-class) and the vernacular or non-standard English (working-class). It has become virtually an orthodoxy that the alternative ideology is not only withheld from academic researchers, but is actually inarticulate. In Trudgill's Norwich work, 'Favourable attitudes to non-standard speech are not normally expressed ... and emerge only in inaccurate self-evaluation test responses' (1972: 179). This is not the case in Lowland Scotland, certainly.[2]

No amount of ratiocination will bring us any closer to understanding how people see things, what they value, what motivates them, or what they expect from others. There is, however, a simple way to find out: ask them. The appropriate methodology for this is qualitative. I arrived at this method almost by accident. Since I was my own fieldworker, it was important to me to have at least some aspects of the research that I could discuss explicitly with my informants, for practical reasons of ease in interaction, as much as ethical ones, of treating them as authoritative sources, rather than experimental subjects.[3] I drew up a list of about one hundred Glasgow words, based on sources such as local dialect

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literature, and preliminary interviews with older women and with children. Without my being aware of it at first, I was directed towards the agenda of an on-going debate on linguistic change among the older members of the community. The questionnaire also included the questions whether people noticed any differences in the speech of older/ younger people and in the speech of the opposite sex. Seventy-five working-class people from the East End of Glasgow answered all or part of the questionnaire in the context of small group interviews in settings such as pensioners' clubs, youth clubs, mother-and-toddler groups, workplaces and bars. The results were very rewarding. I obtained a large corpus of comment on language and social history. Subsequently, Walker, ed. (1985) became available, making it possible to place my explorations within a general intellectual framework.

Qualitative studies are becoming increasingly popular in social research, whether as a preliminary, to generate hypotheses for more narrowly-focussed quantitative work, or as ends in themselves. The essence of the qualitative method is to listen to what people have to say about a policy, situation or process that directly affects them, and to distil their comments into a manageable summary of opinion on that question. The art of qualitative research is to create situations in which people will talk freely and openly. There are often contradictions and subtleties to be discovered in 'private versions' if these can be elicited, as opposed to the stereotyped, consensual 'public version' that the community may have evolved (Cornwell, 1984).

The advantages of qualitative methods are discussed by Walker (1985). Briefly, these are:

a) qualitative research allows the discovery of unanticipated information;

b) it draws on the inside knowledge that informants have of situations in which they are involved;

c) it can handle topics that are not (or not yet) suitable for quantitative research because they are, for instance too complicated, or too subtle, or concerned with shifting phenomena such as interaction, or processes of change;

d) it makes good use of rich and varied information without being constrained to discard what does not fit a pre-conceived analytical format.

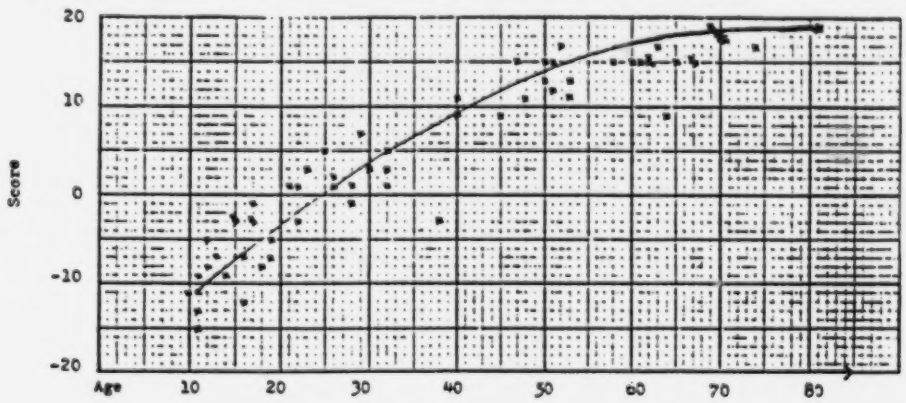
From the point of view of linguistics, the overwhelming advantage might be said to be the direct relevance of qualitative data for teleological forms of explanation, i.e. explanations in terms of goals and motives.

The research outlined here combines quantitative and qualitative elements - the tension between them proved very productive. At an early stage in sorting the data on individual words (claimed knowledge and use,

with incidental comments) a contradiction became apparent. The loss of dialect lexis as my figures showed it, by age, was neither so thorough nor so abrupt as older informants represented it. Likewise, adults predicted that children would not know specific items (e.g. well 'tap', two bob 'two shillings') whereas my figures showed them to be well-known to children in the area.

In order to generalise beyond individual words, the scores of 62 informants (the number is smaller because the questionnaire was not completed with all informants) were aggregated for 19 items that were clearly declining in apparent time: tanner 'sixpence', hunch cuddy hunch (a children's game), barlay (a children's truce term), guisers (a Hallowe'en tradition), knock 'clock', waggity-wa (type of clock), poky hat 'ice cream cone' (used to children), sugarallie 'liquorice', peenie and thibbet (types of apron), hippen 'baby's nappy', brace 'mantelpiece', closet 'w.c.', pen(d) (an architectural feature), jawbox 'kitchen sink', well 'water tap', syn(d) 'rinse', the butts 'the fire engine', fernietickles 'freckles' (an endearment). This produced the fairly even curve of Figure 1.

Figure 1. Both sexes' claimed knowledge of selected words



This provided a hypothesis: that there was a generation gap of some kind in the recent linguistic history (real time) of this community. The research then proceeded along both qualitative and quantitative lines, with a focus on age differences (in variables analysed from the recordings) and on comments on age-related themes.

The initial contradiction was resolved when I took into consideration informants' comments about the question whether they used each given word in the lexical questionnaire. The over-40s (in 1984) in particular frequently offered a refinement to this, to the effect that they formerly used a word, but no longer did so. My question had not been subtle enough to detect the real difference between the older generation of adults and the younger, which lies in the difference between using words as the normal everyday terms, and using them, if at all, as a stylistically marked alternative to Standard English. Many words that were once the

only terms in people's mouths appear to have largely dropped out of active use, with a consequent decline in passive knowledge of them amongst younger speakers. The older generation, having participated in this change, are particularly conscious of the demise of earlier speech habits. As one lady in her 60s remarked about the word hippen: 'Ma Da always used that word, an ma Maw, hippen. Nappy now. [use] No - no noo Ah don't, but when Ah was young, it's the only word Ah knew.'

The 'public' version, then, stereotypes the decline of Scots, but 'private' versions showed grandparents perceiving themselves to be an embarrassment. For instance, a grandfather confides:

> The whole point is, see, Caroline, Ah get - Ah cannae get sayin - see ma wee grankiddies? They [the parents] 're, 'Don't [listen tae] yer granda, that's no how ye say the thing, that's -' Ah'm gettin knoacked back. Ah'm gettin knoacked back wi sayin Scotch words.

I was struck by accounts of adults altering their language in deference to their (grand)children's education. One young mother told a young father, who claimed to use the word knock, ' You're no teachin the wean a very good lesson, are ye? The wean'll go tae school an tell the teacher it's a knoack. An she'll think ye cannae talk right.' But more than this it shows the adults at a disadvantage, and even accepting correction from the young:

> First young mother: An Ah used tae call it ginger, but the weans checked me.
> Second young mother: Ah know. They check ye an tell ye it's juice.
> Third young mother: The first thingwy Ah heard juice was actually in England. Ye know they called it juice doon there. Then Ah come in here, the weans were callin it juice. [...] His Ma was killin ersel at Desmond, 'Ah want juice!'

Older speakers who have not adjusted to changes in everyday speech can feel eccentric and out of touch. A lady in her late seventies tells the following story:

> C'mere an Ah'll tell ye a wee laugh: ma twin - ma brother an me's twins - he's ten i a family, Ah've nane, Mary - an ma other niece's daughter, she was up visitin er mother an oor Andy was in, an we just cawed im Aundra - Scoatch - but it's Andrew - [...] Ah think e'll maybe be aboot ten, Scott - e says, 'Uncle Andrew, are you French?' E says, 'Away, an don't be daft! Ah'm Brigton!' E says, 'Where's that? Is that abroad?' Fae Brigton! Jeannie - that was ma niece's daughter - hulkin brute - she says, 'But Uncle Andra, e disnae really - e talks -' They're away in Dal- somethin, ootside i Stirlin, Ah cannae mind - Ah've been there, but Ah cannae mind i it - she says, 'What is your name?' She says - e says, 'Andrew.' But why did we never caw im that? That was the Brigton folk. An we'd always say, 'Oor Aundra'. Well, the wean, e's gettin teached - learned French at school, e thoat it was a wee French name ! E's sittin, 'Ah never knew Uncle Andrew was that.' She says, 'It's Brigton.' That was just a Scoatch word for it, Aundra. For Andrew. But it just shows ye how ye can - folk thinks ye're daft.

The young, on the other hand, are perceived to be foul-mouthed. It seems to be generally agreed that standards of behaviour with regard to swearing are falling, and that many children swear freely (and often understand what they are saying as well). Until recently there was a consensus about the rules of swearing. Although they might not always be observed, they were understood to exist, and to break them was to define oneself as 'rough'. Humorous vulgarity was acceptable amongst friends and family (e.g. 'What's for dinner?' 'Sheep shite and smiddy ashes'), but 'unneccessary' obscenity was justified only by strong feeling, and never in mixed company or in front of children.

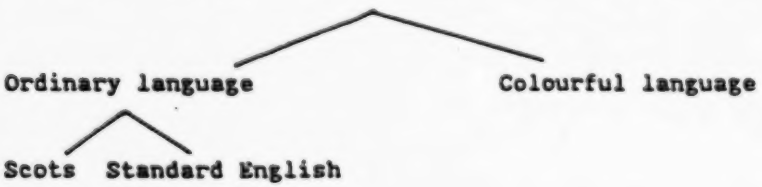
Most parents now seem unwilling to enforce their standards by battering them into their offspring, especially as the trend is a general one in the world outside. What is not sufficiently realised is that the working-class blame 'liberated' people in higher classes for setting a bad example, especially through the mass media. The following comment from a grandmother is typical:

> Well, as Ah'm sayin, they're gettin away wi it. When you hear it on that television that's what's the cause of it. [...] Don't you think that's influencin the kids tae think, 'Well, if they can say it, Ah can't [sic].' We didn't have that. We'd just our own parents' example. If our parents didn't swear, we didn't, But now they're hearin it on the air an they're comin away wi it. [...] Cos they think, 'Oh, great actress, a famous actress came away wi this word.' An as Ah say, even the royalty are comin away wi it.

Whether or not television is the culprit, this seems to indicate a dissolution of the old dividing line between roughness and respectability in behaviour.

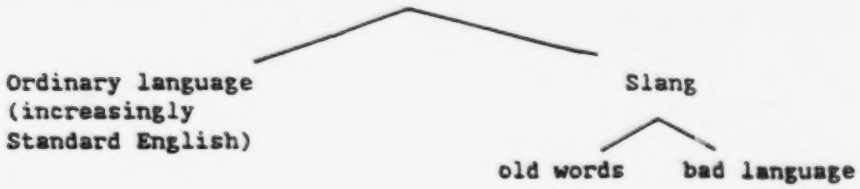
A similar blurring of pragmatic distinctions may be taking place in relation to slang. On the basis of the language labels used spontaneously in the recordings, at least some older adults (in the 46+ age group) retain the term Scotch /skotʃ / or /skɔtʃ/ in their everyday terminology, and with it a classification of speech styles as in Figure 2. As one middle-aged man put it, 'There's two languages here: Scottish an bad language'.[4]

Figure 2. Implicit classification of Glasgow speech (older people)



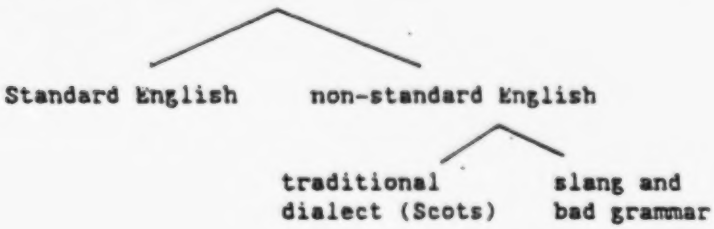
Younger speakers appear to have a different classification, as in Figure 3, in which Scots now comes within the category of slang.

Figure 3: Implicit classification of Glasgow speech (young people)



Older people sometimes use the term slang in a self-deprecating way too, but the existence of the term Scotch (or Scots from some middle-aged speakers) indicates a distinct conceptual category.[5] Younger speakers (25 and under) appear to see linguistic variation in terms more like those of the Scottish middle-class (Figure 4, and see Aitken, 1982).

Figure 4: Accepted classification of language varieties in Lowland Scotland



If the older way of talking and thinking about the vernacular is dying out, then there is a possibility that many traditional Scots words - those that have passed from active everyday use into passive knowledge and occasional use - will come to be seen as simply the colourful language of an older generation, subject to changes in fashion:

> girl: some older generations just talk the same wey as we dae, because they just pick it up. [...] So maybe aw the patter'll cheynge when we get aulder. We'll still be usin this, other people - other younger people'll be usin different ...

The usual reaction to Scots as colourful language is to find unfamiliar sayings interesting and amusing and perhaps to make a mental note of them for later mention:

> woman (early 30s): Aye - what was it noo - Ah heard this wuman sayin, an Ah was laughin. What did she say for 'rinsin'? [...] - she had this soapy waater aw left. An she went, 'Aw, that's a shame tae waste that ...' - an what did she say? It was a right auld-fashiont word. Aw, Ah cannae remember. An ah mean - sapple. 'That's a shame tae waste that sapple.' It was aw this lovely soapy waater, an she'd only waashed wan wee thing in it, an she went, 'Anythin else tae get waashed? That's a shame tae waste that sapple.' Ah thoat that was dead funny.

There is no sense that such words and forms are the correct ones (the 'right' word) to be imitated by the hearer or re-adopted into everyday use.

The change that has taken place begins to look like the generation gap as Mead describes it. Those who grew up before or during the Second World War have lived through changes so profound, rapid and global that they are, as she puts it, 'time migrants' in the modern world:

> no generation has ever known, experienced, and incorporated such rapid changes, watched the sources of power, the means of communication, the definition of humanity, the limits of the explorable universe, the certainties of a known and limited world, the fundamental imperatives of life and death - all change before our eyes. (1978: 75)

'Post-figurative' cultures - i.e. cultures in which the life experiences of adults can be taken as a model by the young - are disrupted everywhere in the world.[6] On the contrary, adults now look to young people for guidance on how to conduct themselves. The explanation often offered for no longer using a dialect word - that young people would not understand it - is very feeble, but also very telling, as it shows precisely this tendency of the older generation to model their behaviour on the young, rather than the other way round.

To the extent that the over-40s (in 1984) conform to the modern world in which they find themselves, the generation gap is concealed by a facade of unity. I examined about 52 000 words of speech from the same 62 speakers. Taking a large number of low-frequency variables in lexical incidence and morphology (covering the bulk of the dialect forms in the corpus), I found no age differences in the occurrence of Scots forms.[7] Individual Scots forms were spread over the age range, and there was a slight <u>negative</u> correlation of broadness of speech (crudely, the number of variables in which Scots forms were exhibited) with age.[8]

It is impossible to say what proportion of the average speaker's vocabulary the disappearing words represent. The potential vocabulary of Scots is so large (the SND has about 30 000 headwords) and loosely structured, that its decline is not readily measurable. The decline of dialect lexis has been cumulative since the onset of standardisation - in Lowland Scotland, the late sixteenth century - but declining words do not necessarily die out completely. A large proportion of the Scots vocabulary is <u>passively</u> known from songs, literature and historical contexts (including family lore). Even if not large numerically, the recent phase of this loss would be significant, because many of these words are very salient in living memory: they were formerly everyday words. Their disappearance is a perceptible indication of change in the consciousness of speakers, the subjective reflection of material change. Each shift away from traditional means of production shifts the vocabulary of everyday life towards Standard English. Such change is not new, but the form it takes is specific to each period of time, this century being characterised by the growth of mass production and mass markets. It is not surprising, given a qualitative input from dialect speakers themselves, that the resulting emphasis should be on the levelling or decline of dialect.

British researchers have written very pessimistically of the demise of traditional dialects. Murison considers that the dialects of the industrial areas in particular are more 'broken English' than Scots, in view of 'the general currency of standard and substandard and slang English' (1977: 56). Unfortunately, this kind of comparison between the past and the present can be invidious, undermining attempts to gain respect, or at least tolerance, especially in the educational system, for the living dialects. Others are resolutely cheerful, but their reassurances sound hollow. Upton et al. (1987: 12) quote Joseph Wright's 1898 comment that 'pure dialect speech' is rapidly disappearing. While agreeing with this, they rephrase it as 'an acceleration in the pace of dialectal change' and observe that:

> Such levelling as there has been is most evident in standardisation of grammar and in erosion of obsolescent sections of vocabulary, including, for example, many variants of older agricultural terms. This is, however, simply part of a continuing process of change, which has left regional accents relatively unscathed. (1987: 12)

Neither of these ideological positions - pessimistic valediction or optimistic propaganda - gets us any closer to understanding the cultural significance of what is going on, certainly not as far as the dialect speakers themselves are concerned.

We can presumably take the maintenance of broad dialect styles (in informal conversation in the present study) as a sign of the continuity and stability of the (lower) working-class character of the East End of Glasgow. On the other hand, the complete overhaul of the physical fabric of the area, in the context of a general abolition of poverty in the 1950s (Laslett, 1983), means that people are almost literally living in a different world, and this is reflected in lexical change.

Any specific case of language shift - whether an abrupt shift in a bilingual (including bidialectal) context or a gradual levelling of one dialect towards another - can be interpreted in terms specific to the society in which it occurs. But it is clear that there are larger forces at work - the shift is never from a world language or standardised koiné towards a minority language or non-standard dialect. This is so obvious that it may seem inevitable or almost natural. In explanation, Thelander (1980) appeals to the general idea of modern life. An isolated attempt to give substance to this idea in a sociolinguistic context is Hertzler (1966). She coins the term uniformation as the opposite of the differentiation that has traditionally been the concern of dialectologists. This is a blanket term for a range of centralising and homogenising forces in the twentieth century, which she lists in outline. It is difficult to bring such a global interpretation to bear on a small localised study. This was certainly a problem in the present research. It seemed that to account for the case of dialect levelling in the East End of Glasgow, it was necessary to enter into an account of the main economic and technological advances of the twentieth century, together with their social and cultural impact. This is indeed the territory sketched out by Hertzler. Nevertheless, it is important to set the

individual case against the larger picture. The consequence of not doing so is that the explanations offered for specific cases of language shift may be hopelessly incommensurate with the scale of the forces at work. The idea of sociolinguistic prestige, for instance, offers us social ambition and snobbery as the explanation of change towards Standard English. This hardly does justice to the complexity of human feelings, even if there were no more than feelings involved. But there are also fundamental material bases for language shift. Many of these are universal in modern societies, since they derive from technological innovations and forms of industrial organisation - forms of transport, mass communications, production and consumption - that in themselves largely consitute modernisation.

The findings of this study suggest that, in effect, those forms persist that are non-standard without at the same time expressing a distinctive conceptual order. This unevenness in linguistic change is what we would expect of the spontaneous convergence of one language variety on another. Vocabulary is inherently more open than the systems of syntax, morphology and phonology. Thus its flexibility in encoding ideas allows it to adapt readily to cultural change. Mutual intelligibiity is increased and differences in codability between vernacular and standard levelled, in the most direct and economical way.[9] The picture of social immobility combined with cultural erosion that emerges calls to mind very strongly the view of the British working-class presented by Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy (1957). He deplores the tawdriness and cynical materialism of the popular culture that was already in the 1950s beginning to seduce working-class people away from a traditional way of life and set of values that was 'good and comely' (1957: 37). In the 1980s it is even more heartbreaking to see how thoroughly modern communications have unified the world, and how little of any practical or moral value is actually exchanged thereby. In this context, lip-service to working-class culture and language would be rather belated.

FOOTNOTES

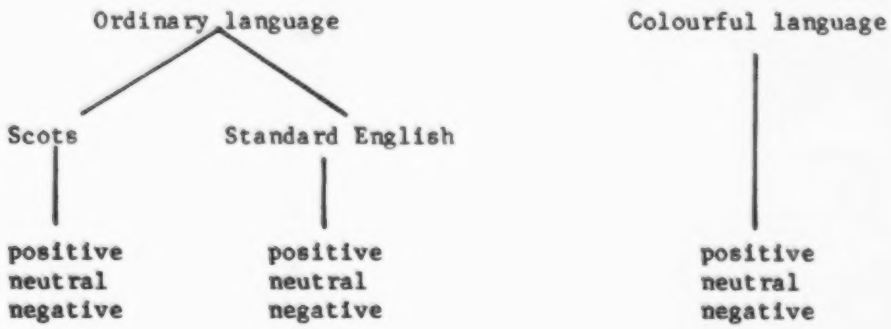
1. I can give only the briefest summary here. The findings are reported in detail in 'Some Studies in the Glasgow Vernacular' (University of Glasgow PhD, 1988). An outline can be found in Macafee (1987).

2. The only work known to me that gives a coherent version of the working-class point of view on language is Barltrop and Wolveridge, The Muvver Tongue (1980), an account of Cockney language from within. There are also some useful pointers in Roberts (1971), and Tom Leonard's poems in Glasgow dialect (see e.g. Intimate Voices, 1984) express, in their pungent way, many of the same feelings that emerged in my research, as well as others beyond its scope.

3. It is important to treat informants' views as a source of insight and interpretation, rather than as interesting 'behaviour' to be explained away.

4. Such words will not necessarily die out completely. A large proportion of the Scots vocabulary is passively known from songs, literature and historical contexts (including family lore).

5. The actual terminology was quite varied. Figures 2-4 are abstractions based on an analysis of terms used in spontaneous comments. These were sorted within eight cells (four age groups and the two sexes) according to the following scheme:



A different conceptual framework for the under-25s is suggested mainly by the absence of specific terms for Scots. This is an incidental finding, which requires to be investigated further.

6. Whereas Mead would see the opening up of the generation gap as the most significant discontinuity in modern history, Laslett takes the view that all subsequent social changes since industrialisation are eclipsed by that process, which he describes as not so much an experience but 'a perpetual tendency towards continual change' (1983: 251).

7. There were 21 groups of words and morphemes, including, -in(g), -nae (the enclitic negative particle), past tense and past participles of strong verbs, and sets of words differing from Standard English in lexical incidence, such as the sets represented by hoose = house, drap = drop, watter = water, fit = foot, yaise = use, merr = mair = more. Less frequent words were gathered into miscellaneous variables, more frequent ones were considered individually.

   Impressionistically, there are, of course, age-related differences - these appear in the different slang favoured by different ages, in the occasional use of obsolescent vocabulary by the over-70s, and in different fashions in discourse particles, exclamations and so on. Macaulay (1977) has already demonstrated quantitative differences in phonological variables in a Glasgow sample. I have emphasised dialect (including lexical incidence, which is visible in dialect writing), rather than accent, since I am interested in the continuity of a cultural tradition.

8. Interviews differed in how relaxed the atmosphere was, single sex interviews (i.e. with women) often being much more successful in terms of recording broad speech. This swamped any correlations that might have emerged with social stratification (within the working-class) or sex. Children were particularly broad, but so were many of the older women, while older men and teenage girls tended to be shy.

9. If standardisation is simply following the linguistic line of least resistance, one is left wondering about the role of education and the mass media. I would suggest that these agencies simply facilitate, and prepare people to accept and adjust to, changes that are already taking place in their economic and social environment.

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